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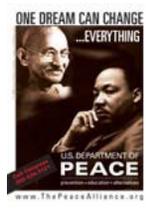
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Interfaith for Peace in South Florida
 by [Ana Campos](#)
 South Florida State Coordinator

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Late one Thursday night a few weeks ago, I received this last minute invitation.

"[The Islamic Center of South Florida](#) cordially invites you, and any interested friends, to share with their congregation a break-the-fast meal (Iftar) on Sunday evening, at their mosque in Pompano Beach. During the meal, [JAM & All](#) will present an

interfaith panel with discussion and questions from the audience, featuring Geshe Konchog Kyab, Rabbi Marc Labowitz, Father Michel Pugin, Mr. Ramesh Cassie and Imam Hasan."

For about a minute - I tensed up and thought of all the reasons/excuses not to go - "Sunday is my day off, I've got pets to feed, chores to do, etc..." The truth is, I was also thinking what business do I, a double Catholic (Cuban - Irish) girl, have wandering into a mosque to represent HR-808 and the Department of Peace? I asked my co-workers what they thought and each one said, "Don't go." That's when I realized I had labeled myself and other people's advice to me was based on their own fears, prejudice and lack of knowledge.

So, based in part on multiple "No Ana, don't do it!"s, I said yes. What business did I have not going? I then invited volunteers from our group along for the ride, so they too could have the opportunity to jump a "media-created" barricade, be a Peace Representative and share HR-808 with others.

We were wholeheartedly embraced the minute we walked through the door. The Rabbi, the Cleric, the Bishop and the Hindu priest all voiced their support of the Peace Alliance and the bill. The Rabbi went so far as to ask for and wear a Department of Peace button that night. All of them said, "More people, all kinds of people, need to know about this 'peace bill!'"



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JAM interfaith panel from left to right:

Monk Geshe Konchog (Buddhist), Imam Hasan Sabri (Islam), Lay Priest Ramesh Cassie (Hindu), Bishop Michel J. Pugin (Catholic), Rabbi Marc Labowitz (Judaism), and JAM President Kamruz Hosein

As the interfaith panel was finishing up, I heard an announcement that made me freeze. A stir came from the crowd as the President of JAM, Kamruz Hosein, announced that "Ana from the Department of Islam will be speaking next." Not knowing this was going to happen, I gulped. Kamruz went on to say "Relax people, Islam means Peace." With that I forced myself to walk through a large crowd of culturally diverse people and speak publicly.



As most of you know, public speaking is definitely not for me. This was my 3rd time and a surprise. The beauty of this was the crowd encouraging me as I walked past them. I stood before them, said something about the Peace Alliance, something about the "Peace bill" and turned it around and asked the panel (my favorite question), "How do we remove the labels and see each other as people?"



Ana and JAM President Kamruz Hosein

On the way back to my seat, people thanked me repeatedly for posing the question and sharing the "Peace Bill" with them. A City Commissioner approached me and volunteered to present a City Council Resolution - on her own. I spoke with two men from Palestine, and we agreed we're just plain tired. Tired of the fighting, the anger, the multiple wars. As a result, they invited us to do a presentation before their large congregation. I said, "Yes, thank you. How cool would it be to cross more barriers and have an article written about the DOP in a Palestinian newspaper?" Several people signed up as volunteers, and we made connections with people from different cultures (Pakistan, Palestine and Egypt) and different faiths (Islam, Judaism, Buddhists and Hindus).

It was an amazing opportunity for growth and unity to walk into a room with 350 - 400 Muslims, learn about our similarities and share the DOP bill with all cultures. Our group

was inspired by this experience so much we're now realizing we should be focusing on Mosques, Synagogues, Buddhist Temples and all cultures. Not just what resides within our "comfort zones".

As I went to sleep that night, I reminded myself, when doors open - walk through them quickly. And always leave the chores for tomorrow (lol)

Special thanks to Trudi Degrazia and the members of JAM for inviting us, and to Elena Brodskaya for the photos above. For more photos, click [here](#).

About JAM & All

There is not one kind of tree,
or one kind of bird,
or flower, or religion.
Life loves diversity,
and so, too,
do the members of JAM.



Illustration by Phoebe Stone, from the book *In God's Name* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso.
(See <http://www.JamandAll.org>)

Jam & All is a non-profit organization of Jews, Muslims, Christians and all peoples dedicated to fostering understanding, social harmony, and peace through dialogue, multicultural interaction and educational projects.

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